

nor is there a playground provided, and the work is carried on at present under very primitive conditions. With reference to the opening of new schools, it would be found a great convenience were arrangements made for their opening at specified periods of the school year, as, for example, at the reopening of the schools at the end of the midsummer or midwinter holidays. The present plan leads to many irregularities owing to the non-arrival of desks and other appliances.

Last year attention was drawn to the improved external appearance of many of the school buildings that belong to the Board, but, although the outside is attractive, I have noticed in a number of them the increasing depredations of the beetle-borer, and rapid destruction is taking place in several of the schools. Coal-tar water washed into the match-lining is a specific, and this might easily be undertaken at almost nominal cost. In populous places like Napier, Gisborne, and Hastings it might be deemed advisable, when additions have to be supplied, to substitute brick for wood, as is being done in the larger educational districts of the colony. The same plan has been found necessary in New South Wales and Victoria, and although the cost of brick buildings is, perhaps, one-fourth greater than that of wood, the life of the buildings and the attendant conveniences amply compensate for the additional cost.

Fourteen districts where schools have been established have buildings that do not belong to the Board. It is true that the majority of these schools are small, and may, perhaps, be termed subsidised schools; but places like Waipiro, Mohaka, and Omahu, not to mention several others, are in need of suitable buildings and playgrounds. The attendance at each of these schools warrants provision being made for improved conditions for teaching and physical training, and although the children mainly belong to the Native race the schools have been established by the Board, and ought to be maintained with some semblance of efficiency. A curious anomaly prevails along the whole of the East Coast where Native and Board schools are working, in a measure, side by side. The Native schools, which are under the control of the central Department of Education, have good buildings and residences, with well arranged school-grounds, and even illustrated papers are supplied for the benefit of the pupils; whilst the Board schools at Omahu, Mohaka, Nuhaka, Tokomaru, Waipiro, and Port Awanui are conducted in hired and unsuitable buildings, without recreation-ground for the children or accommodation for teachers, and illustrated papers constitute a luxury that would be much appreciated even by the teachers. Nor would I for a moment have it imagined that the Native schools of the central department are too well provided for. This is by no means the case, but my purpose in making the comparison is to show how much attention is necessary to bring up the administrative efficiency of a number of the Board schools that are now established in places where no educational advantages are available but such as the public school provides.

The year that has just closed will be long remembered by many of the teachers for the havoc that has taken place in the school attendance. Bad weather, impassable roads, sickness such as measles, whooping-cough, diphtheria, and influenza have followed in regular succession, and as a consequence the regularity of the children shows a falling off when compared with previous years. The case of the Woodville School will serve to illustrate the difficulties of the majority of the teachers during the year. At the time of my inspection in November, 136 pupils out of a roll of 381 were absent through sickness, and, although the school had been compulsorily closed fourteen weeks out of twenty-six that had elapsed from the time of my previous visit, the twelve weeks of actual schooling had been of little or no use to the children, as from a fourth to two-thirds of the pupils were absent on the average. I do not think that much compulsion has been attempted in any of the districts; indeed to have attempted such would have ended in trouble under the unusual conditions that have existed in so many places.

The school attendance, as shown by the numbers on the school rolls at the time of my examination, gives an increase of 101 pupils for the year. This is exclusive of two schools which have not yet been examined. The total number of pupils on the rolls at the time of examination was 7,683. The quarterly returns as sent to the Board give much higher results, the total number being 7,955 for the year, with a working average attendance of 6,640. This represents a regularity of 83.4 per cent., whilst it was 85.8 per cent. during the year 1898. Owing to various causes I was unable to examine Omahu and Ti-tree Point before the termination of the school year, but they will be visited as soon as possible after the reopening in February.

Portland Island School has at last been examined. I had the good fortune to visit it early this year in company with his Lordship the Bishop of Waiapu in one of the local steamers. The isolated condition of this school impels me to ask, on behalf of the children, for special consideration. Away from means of intercourse, the children are sadly in need of pictorial illustrations, and I cannot but think that the Education Department, if appealed to, would place such a school on the list for free copies of papers like the *Graphic* and *Illustrated London News*, and such other pictorial papers as may be supplied to Native schools. All other schools have been duly visited and examined except Tiniroto, which was closed at the time of my inspection, and the examination was in consequence deferred till March.

Reference was made last year to the unusually large number of pupils in the preparatory classes over the age of eight years, but the past year shows a steady improvement in this direction. The diminution in the number of children in the classes below Standard I. is quite marked, and it is commendable to the teachers to find that heed has been given to the remark made in a former report to the effect "that an extra effort might be made in certain schools to lower the high proportion of children over eight years of age in the preparatory classes." This has certainly been done, as the figures in the accompanying table will show.

Of the 7,683 pupils who were presented for examination, 5,182 were in standards, and 2,501 were in the preparatory classes. The passes for the year, excluding the fifty-one pupils who were in the class above Standard VI., was 4,321, or 86.5 per cent. of the total number who were examined.